



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Massachusetts State Office

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NEWS RELEASE

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Taunton River Watershed farmers may be eligible for USDA Conservation Security Program

AMHERST, Mass. -- The Lower Taunton River, a section of perhaps the most diverse and intact coastal riverine ecosystem in all of southern New England, has been selected by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) as Massachusetts' watershed for the Conservation Security Program (CSP) in 2006. Farmers who have land in the selected watershed and who practice good soil and water conservation may be eligible for CSP payments.

The purpose of CSP is to reward the best conservation farmers for their stewardship efforts and motivate others to become good stewards of the land.

An informational meeting on CSP is planned for January 25 at 1:30 pm at the USDA Farm Service Agency building, 84 Center Street, Dighton, Mass. Farmers who are interested in learning more about CSP should contact Melissa Hayden at the NRCS West Wareham field office at 508-295-5151, ext. 112, to determine their potential eligibility and to reserve a seat at the meeting.

The Lower Taunton River watershed includes parts of the following towns: **Attleboro, Berkley, Dighton, Easton, Foxboro, Mansfield, North Attleboro, Norton, Plainville, Raynham, Rehoboth, Sharon, Somerset, Stoughton, Swansea, Taunton, Walpole and Wrentham.** This section of the Taunton River watershed includes the Mill River, Three Mile River, Wading River and the mouth of the Taunton River.

The CSP sign-up process requires farmers to conduct a self-assessment to determine on their own whether they are eligible for the program. Information on the CSP program, including maps of the selected watershed and links to the self-assessment workbook, are available on the NRCS Massachusetts website at www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp.

CSP offers payments, for five or ten-year contracts, on part or all of an agricultural operation. The more conservation work a farmer has completed and promises to do in the near future, the higher the payment he or she is eligible to receive.

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To qualify for CSP, farms must have soil erosion and water quality practices in place, including nutrient and pest management. Lands that are eligible include cropland, orchards, vineyards, hay land, pasture lands, and incidental forest land.

The Taunton River, the largest freshwater contributor to the Narragansett Bay estuary in Rhode Island, is among 110 watersheds nationwide to be included in CSP in 2006. The watershed encompasses more than 5,400 acres of farmland, 58,000 acres of forest land and 29,000 acres of developed land. The Taunton River is the only major coastal river in the region without a dam or obstruction over its entire length.

CSP, part of the 2002 Farm Bill, was introduced in the summer of 2004 in 18 watersheds nationwide. In 2005, two Massachusetts watersheds in Berkshire and Essex counties were selected for the program. Eleven farms in the two counties were selected to participate. Annual contract payments to those farms will total nearly \$100,000 statewide over five years.

About one eighth of the nation's eligible farmers will be given the chance to apply each year over an eight-year period. The program will continue to be offered each year, on a rotational basis, in as many watersheds as funding allows.

Lower Taunton River Watershed

